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ABSTRACT

This report details a study of Americans' attitudes toward child care arrangements and associated tax benefits. The study was conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide on behalf of the Family Research Council, and consisted of a total of 1,004 telephone interviews completed between December 19 and 21, 1997 with adults 18 years or older living in the continental United States. The key findings of this study were as follows: (1) interviewees rated care by a child's own mother as the single most desirable form of care, regardless of race, age, partisanship, or income; (2) care by a child's own grandmother, aunt, or other family member and care by a child's own parents working split shifts were also seen as desirable; (3) 71 percent of interviewees said that tax relief should be available to all families with preschoolers; and (4) professional care programs such as home day care, nannies, or commercial or government care centers were rated as least desirable. The report also outlines provisions of the Clinton Administration's proposal to expand the role of government in child care and concludes by noting that Americans prefer a child care policy that provides support and incentives for rearing children within the family. (KB)

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AMERICAN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILD CARE

Prepared for
Family Research Council

January 1998

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WIRTHLIN WORLDWIDE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wirthlin Worldwide is pleased to present this summary of research conducted nationwide on behalf of the Family Research Council. This research was designed to understand American attitudes toward child care arrangements and tax benefits associated therewith.

This summary highlights the results of one thousand four (1,004) telephone interviews with adults age 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States. Research was conducted December 19-21, 1997 and is projectable to the entire population within a ± 3.09 percentage point margin of error.

The project leader for this study was Mr. Neal Rhoades, Vice President. He was assisted in all phases of research by Ms. Anne Rzeszut, Research Manager, and Mr. D.J. Mosrie, Research Assistant. Any questions the reader may have about this summary should be directed to Mr. Rhoades or Ms. Rzeszut at (703) 556-0001.

KEY FINDINGS

- Americans want to retain child care duties within the family structure. When presented with nine different pre-school child care options and asked to rate each from least desirable to most desirable, adults rate *care by a child's own mother* as the single most desirable form of care, regardless of race, age, partisanship, or income level. *Care by the child's own grandmother, aunt,* or *other family member* or *care by the child's own parents working split shifts* are also desirable forms of child care.

- An overwhelming majority of adults (71%) say that tax relief should be available to all families with pre-school children, not just families who pay someone for day care.

BACKGROUND

The Clinton Administration has developed a proposal to expand the government's role in child care.

President Clinton's initiative would:

- increase federal child care subsidies to states;
- increase tax credits for families who pay for day care;
- increase Head Start funding;
- establish funding to provide grants for community programs improving child care safety and learning for children through age 5;
- expand funding of school-community partnerships to provide after school care;
- give tax credit to businesses that provide child care for employees;
- fund state efforts to enforce child care health and safety standards;
- provide 50,000 scholarships a year to students working toward child care credential; and
- fund child care research and a consumer hot line.

Nationwide, we find that Americans want to retain child care duties within the family structure. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that an overwhelming majority say that tax relief should not be limited to families that pay for day care, but available to all families with pre-school-aged children.

Clearly these results suggest that, in general, Americans prefer a child care program that provides support and incentive to rearing children within the family.

DESIRABILITY OF CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

To better understand perceptions of child care options, we presented adult Americans with nine different pre-school child care options and asked respondents to rate each using a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is the least desirable option and 10 is the most desirable child care option.

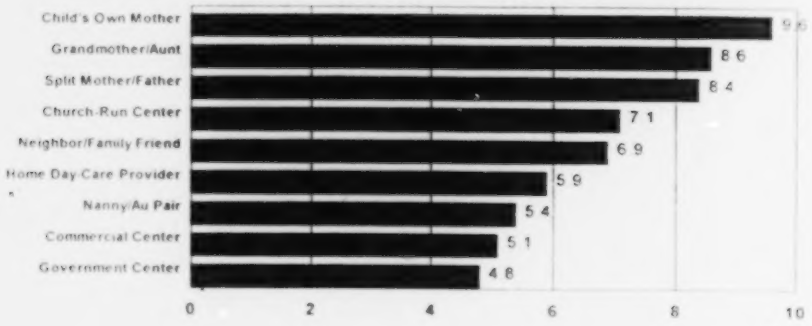
Desirability of the child care options fall out into four basic clusters. Each child care option was classified into a particular cluster based on an average desirability score.

On average, Americans rate *care by a child's own mother* as the single most desirable form of care (9.6 out of 10 possible points).

Moreover, it is important to note that Americans consistently rate *care by a child's own mother* as the most desirable form of care, regardless of race, age, partisanship, or income level. The only significant difference we observe is that women are slightly more likely than their male counterparts (9.7 versus 9.4) to rate care by the mother as more desirable.

However, adults say that *care by the child's own grandmother, aunt, or other family member* (8.6) or *care by the child's own parents working split shifts* (8.4) are also desirable forms of child care. These two child care options constitute the second grouping of suitable child care options.

Desirability of Child Care Arrangements



Source: December B Quorum
Sample Size: 1004
+/- 3.1 95% Confidence Interval

On a scale from 1 to 10, please rate how desirable each of these pre-school child care options are, with 1 being the least desirable and 10 being the most desirable.

Trusted community support branches such as churches and neighbors comprise the third cluster of desirable child care options. Adults identify a *church-run center* (7.1) and *care by a trusted neighbor or family friend* (6.9) as a suitable form of child care, but less preferable to care supplied within the family.

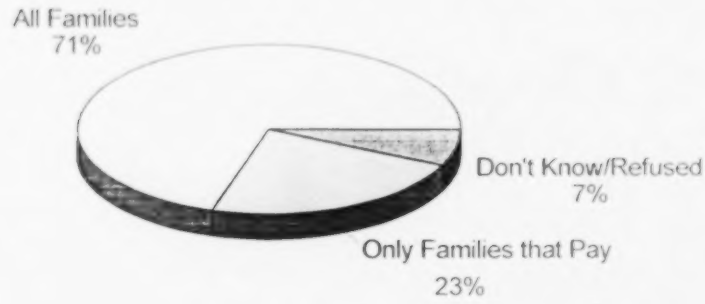
Americans classify professional care programs such as *home day care provider* (5.9), *nanny or au pair* (5.4), *commercial care centers* (5.1) and *government care centers* (4.8) into the fourth and least desirable cluster of child care arrangements.

SUPPORT FOR TAX CREDIT TO FAMILIES WITH PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

To better understand American sentiment toward child care tax relief, we asked adults to tell us whether the tax relief proposed by the Administration should be available to all families with pre-school children or only to families who pay someone for day care.

A strong majority of Americans (71%) support tax relief to all families with pre-school children, while only one-in-four (23%) think that tax relief should only be given to families who pay someone for day care.

Tax Relief to Families with Pre-School Children



Source December 8 Quorum
Sample Size 1004
+/- 3.1 95% Confidence Interval

As you know, the government is interested in providing tax relief to families with preschool children. Should this relief be available to all families with preschool children or only to families who pay someone for day care

Clearly the Congress must consider public support for a pre-school tax credit that includes tax relief for all families, not just those who use paid day care.